SEATTLE PUBLIC UTILITIES
WATER SYSTEM ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Date: 24 September 2009

To: Councilmember Richard Conlin and the Environment, Emergency Management and Utilities Committee Members

Re: Use of Imazapyr in the Cedar River Watershed

The members of the Water System Advisory Committee urge the Seattle City Council to amend the existing ordinance applicable to the use of herbicides in the Cedar River Watershed to allow the use of imazapyr to control knotweed in the watershed.

The existing ordinance forbids the use of any herbicide in the Cedar River Watershed. It was enacted during the 1980s to stop the broadcast use of herbicides for clearing along roads. At that time, the practice of using herbicides in a limited and targeted manner to control invasive plants was unknown.

Knotweed is a highly invasive non-native plant that has become a major environmental threat in North America. This aggressive plant spreads rapidly and thrives in riparian areas. Its presence destroys existing, naturally growing, native plant life and adversely affects soil chemistry. In a relatively short time, knotweed infestations can cause soil erosion, substantial loss of water quality, and destruction of fish and other aquatic life. There is a large and growing knotweed infestation in the Cedar River Watershed, creating a danger of increased turbidity and changes in water quality that would have a negative impact on the Cedar River.

In 2005, the Washington State Department of Agriculture implemented a knotweed management program. Five western counties, including King County, participate in this program. The herbicide imazapyr is the primary method these counties currently use to control and eradicate this destructive plant.

Imazapyr is recognized as an efficient, economical and safe method of invasive weed control. It is used widely in the United States and Canada. The Environmental Protection Agency has approved this chemical for use in riparian and aquatic areas, and extensive toxicology tests have proven its safety. King County currently uses this chemical for knotweed control along the Snoqualmie and Green rivers and portions of the Cedar River below Landsburg. Tacoma has used carefully selected herbicides in its watershed for many years with no adverse effects to water quality.

SPU states that knotweed has taken over fourteen acres in the Cedar River Watershed. So far, SPU has been using a blanket suffocation method to control the weed and to date SPU staff has covered 4.5 acres. The estimated cost of covering the remaining ten acres is more than $500,000 to install and maintain the covering for five years, the length of time it takes to kill knotweed using this method. The estimated cost of one imazapyr application is under $10,000, with an estimated mortality rate of more than 95%. Follow-up monitoring and blanket suffocation of any remaining knotweed would cost an estimated $20,000, bringing the total five-year cost to $30,000 for the herbicide treatment.

The Water System Advisory Committee believes that imazapyr, applied using EPA and WSDA standards, would prove to be efficacious and cost effective and would pose minimal risk to people and wildlife. This chemical should be applied during the fall bloom so prompt City Council action on an expected SPU proposal to amend the existing ordinance is imperative if this program is to start next year.

The committee would be pleased to meet with council members if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Eric Anderson

Priscilla Call

Rachel Cardone

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The members of the Water System Advisory Committee, the Citizen Advisory Committee to SPU's Drinking Water Line of Business, encompass a broad spectrum of the citizenry including a stay-at-home mother, a retired businessman, an accountant, a doctor, an architect, an attorney, and a writer.